



Contributors

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Foreword

Detlef Briesen and Vo Van Thang

The Mekong Delta is the lowest section of the gigantic Mekong River. It flows in the extreme south of present-day Vietnam into a marginal sea of the Pacific Ocean, which in Europe is called the South China Sea, in Vietnam the *Biển Đông* (East Sea). In a strictly geographical sense, the delta landscape already begins at Phnom Penh in Cambodia, but in international perception, Mekong Delta refers primarily to the actual estuary of the river, which drains into the sea on Vietnam's territory via nine main branches and a labyrinth of natural and artificial waterways. Hence its Vietnamese name *Sông Cửu Long* (Nine Dragon River).

In recent years, the Mekong and its delta have become the focus of international attention because both are under threat. This is due to several reasons.

The Mekong is one of the last largely unregulated and relatively unpolluted major rivers on the Asian mainland. Its value for the ecological diversity of the entire Southeast Asian region is inestimable and therefore all the more threatened by water pollution and gigantic dam projects.

At the same time, unique human cultural landscapes have developed around the Mekong as a central lifeline. They are based on traditional but increasingly also on industrial uses of its resources. These are often in conflict with each other.

The delta of the river in particular is, contrary to a perception often prevalent in Europe, a man-made environment. It was created in a process of conflict and cooperation between the peoples of the region that lasted at least three centuries. The process was not always peaceful. Today's forms of coexistence also need to be improved.

In this respect, there are considerable conflicts between the riparians of the Mekong about the use of the resources of the river landscapes. The delta on Vietnamese territory is the last link in the chain and is particularly dependent on the decisions and processes on the upper and middle reaches of the river.



But the Mekong Delta is also threatened from another side, from the sea. The level of the world's oceans is already rising due to global warming, and the delta is particularly threatened by this due to its low elevation above the sea and its complex water flow. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the various dam projects will largely eliminate the silt that washed up the delta in the first place over the past millennia. As a result, the delta threatens to sink into the sea even faster than already predicted by the global scenarios.

All this is reason enough to deal with the Mekong Delta in a basic scientific publication. With this book, we hope to fill an important gap. For we are not aiming at a scientific publication for a selected audience, but we try to give an overview of the Vietnamese Mekong Delta from different scientific perspectives and for a broader audience. After this first step, we then plan continuations of our cooperation. This has developed in an excellent way over the last, now almost ten years, between Justus Liebig University Gießen, Germany, and An Giang University in Long Xuyen, which has now become part of the National University of Vietnam, VNU, in Ho Chi Minh City. And beyond all pressing problems and scientific curiosity: the Mekong Delta is a great cultural and natural landscape with fantastic people for whom every effort is worthwhile.

Gießen and Long Xuyen in Summer 2021

Detlef Briesen and Vo Van Thang